

Talking Points

Ex. 5 - Deliberative Process

- This year, the watershed selection process ran for about seven weeks (late Jan to mid-March), which provided more time for collaboration.
- Funding level is again 5% of EQIP financial assistance funds, about \$33M, with the opportunity for state conservationist to increase funding.
- The program is very similar to FY12, with several changes that EPA supported:
 - First, Pathogens from animal agriculture sources have been added as an eligible pollutant – *note this change was made in response to state requests and will lead, in almost all cases, to controlling nutrient pollution in tandem. [Why - QUICK SUCCESS; EQIP required minimum \$ to animal ag]*
 - Second, additional consideration will be given where the water is also a drinking water source.
- USDA's announcement of the FY13 watersheds came last month, and there were a total of 165 watersheds selected in 51 states and areas, representing a net increase of 10 watersheds from FY12.
- NRCS, State WQ Agencies and EPA staff worked to ensure better collaboration in the states that did not have any recommended watersheds selected last year. Due to their hard work, the Initiative now includes one or more watersheds recommended by the state WQ-agency in every state.
- At this point, the list of watersheds should be fairly stable, at least until all high priority lands are treated with systems of conservation systems, or not enough landowners with priority lands apply for the program
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Background:

- Through the NWQI, USDA NRCS devotes five percent of EQIP financial assistance funds to priority watersheds selected after consultation w/ state water quality agencies.
- In FY12, NWQI invested \$37M of targeted EQIP funds in one-to-three HUC-12 watersheds per state, for a total of 154 watersheds. The initiative is focused on impaired waters, but includes some flexibility (which EPA asked for) as our metrics for identifying nutrient impairments are not rock-solid in all places.
- To put this investment in perspective, it's about the same amount of funding we've lost from the 319 program. In these difficult budget times, we need to capitalize on opportunities like these.
- Last year, the process for identifying priority watersheds moved very quickly. The good news is that USDA selected about two-thirds of the watersheds recommended by state wq agencies. States told us they recommend continued investment in about three-quarter of the FY 12 NWQI watersheds.

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- However, despite these generally good results, we had about a dozen states where USDA did not select any of the watersheds recommended by the wq agency.

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- EPA will support states in NWQI monitoring. We're sponsoring a series of webinars and will also provide technical support for a limited number of states for baseline data review, recommendations on monitoring designs, etc.
- NRCS has developed a framework for edge of field monitoring in a few NWQI watersheds to track the effect of conservation practices on water quality at the field-level.
- NRCS plans to use their edge-of-field data and State instream monitoring data to develop stronger models for estimating load reductions, to supplement the monitored watersheds.